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ADDRESS

TO

YOUNG MEN,

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BY

LORD LYTTELTON.

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ADDRESS.

You will remember the remarkable passage in one of St. John's Epistles,* where, among other classes, he addresses young men as follows: "I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one"; and again more fully, and with repetition, "Because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one."

These words, like others in the Scriptures, suggest the misgiving that they are in present circumstances inapplicable, and not

* 1 John ii. 13, 14.

corresponding to the actual truth of life. We ask, Is it so? Are young men on the whole, and as a class, spiritually strong—dwelt in abidingly by the Word? Have they overcome the evil and wicked one? Nay, are they not, at best, in the heat of the conflict, often, if not most often, conquered rather than conquerors? By any, even the most human standard, are they in any adequate sense strong? Have they reached any firm and settled moral ground whereon to stand?

Compared with the more advanced in life, it might almost seem to us that the saying should be inverted, and applied rather to those. Certainly we must all of us know many of the aged, reposing serenely after their powers of outward activity are gone, of whom we feel we can say, with far more assurance than of any of the young, that they *have* overcome evil, and *have* reached an abiding and settled state.

So, too, we should infer from the too true



proverbial sayings—true, if we look only at the course of nature, unenlightened and unaided from above—such as these, That young men will be young men, that they must sow their wild oats, &c.

But this is only after the manner of Scripture in many respects. The Spirit often speaks of men and of things, not as they are but as they ought to be: of men as they in their better moods profess to be: as they aim at being, and as they, or some of them, are on the whole tending to become in some higher existence; as if looking back at the unfallen state of man, or what man would have become had he not fallen, or what he might now be, even after his fall, would he but fully lay hold on the power held out to him by regenerating grace. So, as is often observed, a Saint in the New Testament simply means a Christian. Alas! are all Christians Saints? The Christian Church, even on earth, is spoken of as a pure

and holy thing—far enough from what it ever has been or is.

It is but a part of the all-pervading mystery, the discord introduced by moral evil into the perfect concord of God's creation: the weakness that ever dogs and besets strength, the inextricable intermingling of good and bad. "An enemy hath done this."* And we are to learn from it, of course, never to be content with what is, but ever to be looking to the fixed standard of what ought to be, so as to endeavour more and more to bring ourselves and others near to it: to measure the constant deflexion of a fallen nature from its normal and commanded state, and rectify it by the strong counterworking of a power above our own.

So, besides the words which I quoted at the outset, you will remember many beautiful expressions in the Bible, chiefly in the mystical language of prophetic vision, about the

* Matt. xiii. 28.

essential state of youth. If, even apart from actual evil, any such creation as this world must be subject to the law of change, it would be strange if the best state of all things were not, in its proper nature, that of the first-ripe growth. "O spring-time," says an Italian, "the youth of the year! O youth, the spring-time of life!"*

Even Christ, in the figurative phrase of the Song of Solomon, is said† to be likened to "a young hart on the mountains of Bether": the mountains of the Lord hear His voice and leap "like the young unicorn" ‡: Job § looks back to the days of his youth, when "the secret of God was upon" him. The "youth" of him who is in God's favour is "renewed like the eagle's": || the perfect nature, again, of Christ is spoken of thus: "Thou hast the dew of thy

* O primavera, gioventù dell' anno!

O gioventù, primavera della vita!

† ii. 17. ‡ Ps. xxii. 6. § xxix. 4. || Ps. ciii. 5.

youth.”* And remember the two immortal passages in that wonderful book Ecclesiastes, which I suppose is inspired in this sense, that the writer was guided to set forth in the most forcible language, as a staple of the book, the unsatisfying view of human life, and the poor attempts of the unaided man to make the best of it, while in occasional glimpses he catches a sight of the true consolation, the prospect of the far land beyond. Both these views, I think, may be seen in the former of the two passages I mean—“Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh; for childhood and youth are vanity.”† I have heard a construction, to my mind most dreary

* Ps. cx. 3.

† Eccles. xi. 9, 10.

and inhuman, put on this famous passage, as if it was meant ironically, and as if it really said, “Rejoice *not* in thy youth.” I believe nothing of the sort. It means to allow the regulated enjoyment, under due control, of the natural pleasures of youth, with a consciousness, never to be put away, that it will be all matter of judgment according to righteousness hereafter. Any other course is what Scripture calls conformity to “the world”: which men arbitrarily take to mean, some one thing and some another, whereas it means simply everything, however dealt with, apart from the will of God, and obedience to Him.

The concluding words may probably be taken as an illustration of what I alluded to in this book, that it has only short and occasional glimpses of the higher truth. The writer seems to “sink down on scathed wing,”* from the height he had just reached, and to fall

* “Christian Year”: St. Michael and All Angels.

back on the merely heathen or Epicurean view—"Childhood and youth are passing vanities, and there is nothing beyond; therefore, make the most of them while they last." This is the one side of Doddridge's famous epigram:—

"Live while you live," the epicure will say,
 "And give to pleasure every fleeting day."
 "Live while you live!" the holy preacher cries,
 "And give to God each moment as it flies."
 Lord, in my life may both united be,—
 I live to pleasure if I live to Thee.

I say the writer very likely meant this, while it is easy for the Christian to give the passage its spiritual sense, at least a sense indicating our true interest—namely, to live, because of the transitoriness of youth and of life, so as to extinguish sorrow and evil in eternity, and not only in this world.

In the other still better known passage,* the material words are the first ones: "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth,

* Eccles. xii. 1.

while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." These words sufficiently illustrate what I said of the essential goodness and value which ought to belong to youth. For what are the "evil days"? Clearly those, compared with youth, of old age and natural decay, which surely are so in some, though not by any means in every, sense. And the good days are those of youth, but if only in them the Creator is remembered, and "the conclusion of the whole matter"* in the fear of Him, and observance of His laws.

Another view may be taken. It seems that though in our minds we may imagine in some sort spirits—though invisible—we can by no effort imagine a form more beautiful than the human, in its highest and best aspects.† Thus we people with angels our imagined

* Eccles. xii. 13.

† Compare Mansel, "Bampton Lectures," 18, 85, 286.

Heaven; and those who have seen, for instance, Lawrence's portrait of Lord Durham's son, aged thirteen, will feel no extravagance in the well-known phrase, "The human face divine."*

Having then looked at the season of youth in this ideal sort of way, we must repeat the acknowledgment that it is often far enough from the actual fact. Youth is, or ought to be, the season of free choice, unstiffened by habit; of the plastic or moulding powers of the mind on itself; the season of elasticity, both moral and intellectual; of resistance to discouragement and apathy; of hopefulness and confidence tempered by modesty, deference, and teachableness; of buoyant spirits and vigour ever new; of growth in practical faith, spiritual insight, and definite purpose.† What, too often, is it?

* "Paradise Lost," III. 44.

† Of course I do not mean very early youth. A man of much experience told me he thought twenty-seven was about the age when a man should be fully fitted for his life's work.

I will read you some characteristic words of a great, singular, and popular writer, with whom many of you, I have no doubt, are acquainted—Mr. Carlyle.* They are, of course, only half in earnest, but in their grim and cynical facetiousness they may serve as a balance, of the pessimist kind, to the lofty and optimist ideal which we have been imagining.

“I have heard affirmed,” says his imaginary hero Teufelsdröckh, “(surely in jest) by not unphilanthropic persons, that it were a real increase of human happiness could all young men from the age of nineteen be covered under barrels or rendered otherwise invisible, and there left to follow their lawful studies and callings, till they emerged, sadder and wiser, at the age of twenty-five. With which suggestion, at least as considered in the light of a practical scheme, I need scarcely say that I nowise coincide. Nevertheless it is plausibly

* “Sartor Resartus,” 132.

urged, that as young ladies are to mankind precisely the most delightful in those years, so young gentlemen do then attain their maximum of detestability. Such gawks are they, and foolish peacocks, and yet with such a vulturous hunger for self-indulgence; so obstinate, obstreperous, vainglorious; in all senses, so froward and so forward.”

Well, whatever may be the faults, from the most venial lapse up to the deadliest sins against which the young have to guard, the question is a practical one, and you will not expect that I can go far into it, or offer you anything new.

In one sense, I need not say, and rightly understood, we accept the Scriptural saying, “The love of money is the root of all evil”;* but for our present purpose, and probably as much at this time as at any former one, if not more, I would rather say, “Idleness is the root

* 1 Tim. vi. 10.

of all evil." Now idleness means doing, doing of any kind, much less than we ought or can. Literally doing nothing is, of course, hardly possible. The old lines put it truly enough,—

“Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do”;

and the true meaning, I conceive, of our Lord's saying about the house swept and garnished,* is a warning against idleness. The house is the soul, or the mind, of man; say of a young man, who has been well brought up and *prepared* for active life: this is the sweeping and garnishing. The evil spirit has been so far, we may trust, driven and kept out by the good influences of which Baptism is the sign and the warrant. But a house swept and garnished means a house only *ready to be occupied*, not yet occupied; and the parable means, that as such a house will be occupied by some one, if not by the good then inevitably

* Matt. xii. 43-45.

by the bad, so it will be of the mind and soul. Unless good influences and principles *prevent*, anticipate, take *prior* possession to the bad ones, preoccupy the ground, infallibly the evil ones will not lose their opportunity, but will come in sevenfold force. The soul cannot lie fallow ; it must produce the benignant and beneficent crop of corn, or the noxious one of weeds and tares.

We may be reminded (though it is not an exact parallel) of a curious passage in Isaiah,* supposed to be addressed to those who pretended to be gods, “Do good or do evil”; at all events do something—almost anything that one can lay hold of is better than doing nothing. And of all the unpromising cases, I doubt if there be any more unpromising than that of those whom of late we have called, by a strange word imported from America, of which the derivation is utterly unknown to and

* xli. 23.

unguessed by me,—“loafers”; fellows who lounge about all day with their hands in their pockets. To put it on the lowest ground, they may be very sure that those who do so are the least likely of all men to have anything in the said pockets worth putting their hands in to draw out.

I would say to young men, Work or play, one or the other; understanding both words in a large sense. Best, of course, if the two are compounded in due proportion and fairly according to rule; nor is any one blameless who does not observe such a rule: but either of them is better than sheer idleness and vacuity. Exercise for the mind, of almost any kind, is work; and if it be for an innocent purpose it is not likely to be wrong, if it does not take the place of some duty; for at least it strengthens the muscles of the mind. Exercise for the body must needs be either work or play, and in one sense, of course, the same thing may be both.

I have heard lately a sort of Utopia delineated for the English workman, as follows :—

Eight hours for work, and eight hours for play,
Eight hours for sleep, and eight shillings a-day.

Now if these four eights are *bonâ fide* occupied as described—if Nature will provide the eight hours' sleep—if the work is good, hard, and steady work—if the meals are taken out of the eight hours for play—if the play includes the cultivation of domestic and social affections, and some mental as well as bodily recreation and refreshment—and if a fair portion of the eight daily shillings is bestowed on appliances for improvement of all kinds, I do not much object to this symmetrical appropriation, where it is attainable. And you will not fail to notice that it leaves no margin for mere idleness.

This advice, however, is particularly addressed to mere handicraftsmen, and many of

you are of a class somewhat above that. But for you, even more than for them, it is a matter of absolute duty, to which I now advert for a moment, to keep the bodily frame well breathed and exercised. I suspect that duty is not as well attended to among the middle classes as it commonly is among the upper by choice, and among the lower by necessity; though I hope it may be better so than some forty years ago, when I remember the publication by an able and sensible man, long since deceased—Lord Dalmeny—of a pamphlet addressed to London tradesmen on the importance of their securing adequate air and outdoor exercise.

Idleness, then, I said, is the root of all or of much evil. One or two special evils may be noted which obviously and indisputably are its growth. One is intemperance. I am not about to give you a teetotal lecture. Apart from the medical ground, of which I am no

judge, and of which I can only say that we must wait till the scientific men can come to something like an agreement among themselves, it is strange that the advocates of Total Abstinence—I mean, those who urge it as an actual Christian duty, and an example which we are bound to set—do not see that they have no argument that does not equally apply to all enjoyments and amusements; for there is none, nor can be, in which there is not temptation to excess, almost always very strong temptation. And on the general cause of temperance there is less need here than in most places to go into any details; for your Minister has, or had not long ago, in actual and fairly successful operation, a system by which those who voluntarily adhered to it bound themselves to two manifestly reasonable conditions,—not to drink *spirits* except under medical advice, and not to separate drinking

alcoholic liquors from eating : in other words, only to drink them at meals.

I am speaking, however, of drunkenness ; and of that it is a commonplace saying, that at least one main cause is idleness ; emptiness of mind and unoccupied limbs. I will not dwell, for in this assembly I hope there are hardly any to whom the words need to be spoken, of the crying evil in these prosperous times, and above almost all other parts of England in this district, of the waste of the time and the resources, to their own loss and that of the nation, of the labouring class. But by all classes everywhere and at all times, are the memorable words of the stern old Prophet to be laid to heart, which he spake of the worst of those sins of the flesh among which drunkenness holds scarcely a lower place: he attributes them to “pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness.”*

* Ezek. xvi. 49.

In speaking of such a vice as drunkenness, we must bear in mind not only what it is, but what it leads to. But this topic is too notorious to be dwelt on. I will only repeat to you an old legend, or apologue, of the times in which men were believed to make strange and mysterious bargains with the Devil, by which they became more or less bound, and bound by irresistible obligation, to act, at least at times, at his bidding. The story is, that some such unhappy man—even as David was offered the choice of three plagues—was once forced to choose between three sins, one of which he must needs commit. To get drunk was one of these. What the other two were is immaterial; it is enough to say that each of them was, simply in itself, a much worse offence than drunkenness. So the poor wretch elected to get drunk; and in that state he committed both the other sins which he had hoped to escape.*

* Berens' "Advice to a Young Man about to enter Oxford." 1832, p. 119.

Apart from legend, the essence of this story is of daily occurrence; and *one* of the sins alluded to may be easily conjectured. It is that on which I have wished to say a few words with plainness, on which account I requested that only men should be admitted this evening,—the sin of impurity. It is not, truly, that women are not in many ways deeply concerned in this matter; but it would be treated in a different manner with them. And on the whole, though not without sad exceptions, it may be said that the contrast between the young of the two sexes in this respect is broad and strong. Especially in the more favoured classes, to young women may be applied the familiar words “Ignorance is bliss,”—the ignorance of innocence and purity; and it certainly is one of the distinctive advantages to them, counterbalancing some relative inferiorities, that herein their temptations are so much less, and, it may be added, in this point of view, the

consequences of sin so much more serious. Surely they, far oftener than we in our youth, can say with truth what the melancholy poet said in his despairing irony,* that “Goodness is no name, and happiness no dream”; for full happiness cannot well be for those who are exposed to the incessant persecution of restless longings and long-deferred hopes, even if they resist, and are not, as the same poet says,† “driven o’er the shoals of guilt, and ocean of excess.”

Now I am not about to dwell on the most ordinary topics, forcible as they are. Indeed I am willing to admit that sometimes, in one point of view, over-strong statements may be made on this matter—I mean in what you will understand as the *subjective* view: that which relates to the man himself alone. If we admit that the temptation, often or generally, is

* Byron’s “Childe Harold,” II. cxiv.

† “Poems,” II. 190. Ed. 1821.

stronger than others, it may not be unreasonable to hold, so far, that the merciful rule may apply, that the stronger temptation may receive the more lenient allowance. But consider what an immense weight is thrown into the other scale, if we look at the case in the manner suggested by what has just been said—namely, in its bearing on the other sex.

Is there any one of you—is there, or has there ever been, in any Christian country at least—nay in any society but the most profoundly depraved—any one who could bear to think, I will not say of any sister, but of any relation or friend, in whom he took any interest, falling into vice? being seduced? Nay, seduction, to a woman, is not the lowest, probably not, in any sense, even the worst form of the vice. It at least implies what is natural, natural passion: generally it may be taken as involving more or less of genuine love. How much lower a depth is that which is so

commonly beyond and after seduction, that in which those most unhappy of the human race dwell, those in whom even the natural, however lawless, relations are inverted, who are themselves the solicitors and the seducers, and in whom the life they lead not only is foreign from love but is not even prompted by lust, but is a mere matter of livelihood and gain !

And if, by common confession, so pitiable and deep-dyed in sin is the condition of these wretched women, what wilful blindness is it which refuses to see that the man is at least to the full extent a sharer in the woman's sin ? Truly, if he reflected at all, he could not but wish that the Mahometan creed, or supposed creed, were true, and that women had no souls to be saved.

I will add but one assurance, which I do not merely from hearsay. You will often hear from the reckless and self-indulgent, that this sin is inevitable and irresistible. It is false.

It can be resisted, like other vices and temptations; and, without adverting to those directly moral and religious arguments, which I may more fitly leave to others, I will only here notice, as the best (I believe) of all secondary aids, that what I said above as to exercise of body and mind—*both* body and mind, you will specially note—has its peculiar force with relation to the vice of which I speak. They will best, and with the least difficulty, resist it, who keep body and mind constantly employed.

One word on another great safeguard, the hope and the prospect of marriage. No greater wickedness, I conceive, has been perpetrated in the history of the world than the enforcement of life-long celibacy. But the sting of it is far more in the life-length than in the compulsion. Compulsion for a time may sometimes be right; at all events it is no more than the constitution of society

inevitably does in all old countries, for the great majority.

It may surprise some of those who only believe about the famous writer Malthus, according to the vulgar error, that he was an opponent of marriage, to know that his object was simply the postponement of marriage till "that period, whatever it may be, when, in the existing circumstances of the society, a fair prospect presents itself of maintaining a family." Surely no great tyranny.* But no doubt this implies in most cases a long-continued resistance to temptation, which is natural enough, as one part of our probation.

I conclude with words, most tender and profound, of a great writer;† written before he had left the Church of his fathers, to her heavy loss—perhaps the heaviest she has ever

* Bk. IV. ch. ii., vol. ii. pp. 327, 328, Ed. 1806. See the whole chapter.

† Newman: *Sermons by Contributors to Tracts for the Times*, V. 324.

sustained: "Blessed are they who give the power of their days, and the strength of soul and body, to Him. Blessed are they who in their youth live to Him who gave His life for them, and would fain give it to them and implant it in them, that they may live for ever! Blessed are they who resolve, come good, come ill, come sunshine, come tempest, come honour, come dishonour, that He shall be their Lord and Master, their King and God! They will come to a perfect end, and to 'peace at the last.' They will, with Jacob, confess Him, when they die, 'as the God that fed them all their life long unto that day, the Angel which redeemed them from all evil': with Moses that 'as is their day, so shall their strength be': and with David, that 'in the valley of the shadow of death they fear no evil, for He is with them, and that His rod and His staff comfort them'; for 'when they pass through the waters He will be with them; and through

the rivers, they shall not overflow them ; when they walk through the fire they shall not be burnt, neither shall the flame kindle upon them ; for He is the Lord their God, the Holy One of Israel, their Saviour.' ” *

* Ps. xxxvii. 38. Gen. xlviii. 15, 16. Dent. xxxiii. 25.
Ps. xxiii. 4. Is. xliii. 2, 3.



